

California State Parks is preparing a General Plan for Donner Memorial State Park



This plan will reestablish the park's purpose and vision, and will guide the management of resources, land uses, and future park development. Goals and guidelines are being developed as the basis for future studies and facility development or resource management programs.

General Plan Process

General Planning for the Department of Parks and Recreation consists of a series of steps that include information gathering, analysis, and proposals with opportunities for public input.

The Donner Memorial State Park General Planning Team has been working with the following schedule:

- Step 1:** Data gathering: Summer, Fall, Winter, 2001
- Step 2:** Issues identification and analysis: Winter 2001/02
- Step 3:** Establish plan goals and develop alternatives: Spring 2002
- Step 4:** Planning Workshop, to present planning goals and alternatives, and receive public comments: May 30, 2002
- Step 5:** Consider public comments for the Preliminary General Plan/Draft EIR: June/July 2002
- Step 6:** Public review of Preliminary General Plan/ Draft EIR (California Environmental Quality Act 45-day public & agency review): August/September 2002
- Step 7:** State Parks and Recreation Commission Hearing: anticipated in the Spring 2003

The Preliminary General Plan/Draft Environmental Impact Report for Donner Memorial State Park is currently available for public review. Please go to the Donner Memorial State Park website for more information about how to see the Preliminary General Plan and comment on its proposals. Written comments on the General Plan/EIR will be accepted until September 23, 2002.

The following is a synopsis of information from the Donner Memorial State Park General Planning efforts to date, including existing cultural, natural, interpretive, and recreation resource information for the park, and planning concepts and alternatives developed during the General Plan process. This information was provided to the public at its Planning Workshop on May 30, 2002, with some recent revisions and updates to reflect the current status of the General Plan and department actions.

GENERAL PLAN and PLANNING ALTERNATIVES

General Questions and Answers on Alternative Proposals in the General Plan:

Q: Much of the park is already developed. Why is the Department completing a General Plan at this time?

A: General plans became a requirement of the Public Resources Code in the mid-1970's, after the existing museum and campgrounds had been built at Donner Memorial State Park.

Based on visitor comments about the inadequacy of the existing museum for user's needs, and building inadequacies for interpretive and park operational needs, the Department has long recognized that a new museum/visitor center at Donner Memorial State Park is desirable. General plans can allow major changes to park infrastructure; there has never been a general plan completed for the park before this time. With the potential for a successful Transportation Enhancement Activities (TEA) grant, the Department created a public – private partnership with a local firm to take advantage of this funding opportunity. A critical look was taken through this general plan process to identify and evaluate alternative in-park building sites in the event that the TEA grant was not feasible.

Another important issue for the park is existing conflicts in traffic circulation at the park's entrance. The General Plan will make recommendations for each of the proposed alternative museum/visitor center sites to improve vehicle and pedestrian circulation in the park, although additional site planning and studies will be needed for specific locations and designs.

The General Plan is also making recommendations for park-wide cultural, natural, and recreation resources management and for specific future studies to determine appropriate management programs and recreational facilities for a majority of the park. The park's boundaries have very recently expanded in size by 750 acres in the Schallenberger Ridge area; the General Plan recommends future studies to determine the most appropriate uses and management strategies for this acquisition.

Planning Zones: A Look at Similar Areas of the Park

The Donner Memorial State Park Planning Team has used the concept of "planning zones" to help prepare goals and guidelines for areas of the park that contain similar characteristics. The proposals that have come from this concept and analysis include two alternative sites for a new museum/visitor center for the park. Proposed goals and guidelines were also developed for natural, cultural and recreational resources in these planning zones. The zones are described below.

- **Planning Zone #1:** Encompasses all park property from Donner Creek north to Donner Pass Road and includes portions of the Teichert property;
- **Planning Zone #2:** Includes lower reaches of the park containing the campgrounds and day use areas; and
- **Planning Zone #3:** All park property from the mouth of Coldstream Canyon to the south and west, including a new land acquisition on Schallenberger Ridge.

Preferred Site Alternatives for a New Museum/Visitor Center for the Park

Using the Planning Zones concept, the Planning Team conducted research and site investigations to evaluate potential building sites within current park boundaries as well as the proposed Teichert building site, and vehicle circulation related to each proposed site.

The Planning Team looked at seven individual sites for a new museum/visitor center:

- #1 - The existing museum site.
- #2 - A site north of the existing kiosk, in an old quarry fill area.
- #3 - A site at the east end of Donner Lake, in an area that has had major site disturbance (cleanup activities prior to Department acquisition).
- #4 - A site south of Donner Creek, north of the campgrounds.
- #5 - A site south of Donner Creek along China Cove Rd.
- #6 - A site on the west side of the Teichert property.
- #7 - A site on the Teichert property adjacent to a large pond that is in the process of restoration for wildlife and natural resource values.

Criteria that were used to determine the “preferred alternative” and the in-park alternative included:

- The site must have **convenient and safe access year-round** from Donner Pass Road, as the museum/visitor center is open all year;
- The site should have **good views of the mountain passes and peaks** that the pioneers traveled, for interpretive purposes;
- The site should be situated so that activities at the facility would present a **minimum of disturbance** to existing park day and overnight use facilities;
- The site should have the potential for the **least adverse impacts** to natural and cultural resources;
- The site should be large enough to accommodate **parking facilities of adequate size** for museum/visitor center users, including tour buses and trucks for facility service.

Following site investigations and analysis, the Planning Team has proposed that the Department’s “preferred alternative” for the development of a new museum/visitor center is the Teichert property, to the east of the current park boundary (alternative site

#7). The specific site would be adjacent to the reclaimed pond. This property (approximately 35 acres), in an agreement with Teichert and as part of a federal Transportation Enhancement Activities (TEA) grant, would be transferred to State Park ownership for this purpose.

The “preferred alternative” includes the following proposed features:

- The general location for this new facility would be at the southwest portion of the existing Teichert property. This site was chosen as the plan’s preferred building site due to spectacular views of the surrounding mountain passes traveled by the pioneers, and for its distance from day and overnight use and archeologically-sensitive areas in the park.
- This alternative proposes that vehicle access to the new visitor center be from Donner Pass Road and through the western portion of the Teichert property.
- Campground and day use areas would continue to be accessed through the existing park entrance and kiosk.
- In addition to parking at the new museum/visitor center, short term and disabled visitor parking would be provided near the Pioneer Monument and the park’s cultural attractions.
- If this alternative were to be implemented, the Emigrant Trail Museum would be converted to offices for park operations and administrative purposes, and screened from public use areas.

If the TEA proposal could not be implemented as planned, the proposed in-park alternative site for construction of a new museum/visitor center is at the east end of Donner Lake (alternative site #3). This site was the Department’s preference for the location of a museum when the park was being enlarged in the early 1960’s (it was not built here because acquisition of that particular parcel was not complete at the time a new museum was funded for construction). This site also provides good views of Donner Pass and transportation routes through the area that have been used since the time of the pioneers. The following are several primary features of the in-park alternative:

- Two separate park entrances off Donner Pass Road.
 - **Main park entrance:**
A camping and day use entrance will be maintained at the existing entrance road and kiosk. The point of entry off Donner Pass Road may be moved slightly to resolve traffic stack-up problems in front of the kiosk.
 - **Museum/visitor center access:**
A museum/visitor center access road is proposed at the west end of the park, in an area that is now an unpaved road.

- The existing Emigrant Trail Museum would be converted into offices for park operations and administrative purposes, and screened from public use areas.
- There would be short-term and disabled visitor parking near the Pioneer Monument and the park's cultural attractions.

Proposed Planning Goal and Guidelines for Planning Zone #1

The following is the Department's **primary goal for Planning Zone #1**:

- **Enhance park entrance, administrative, recreation and interpretive facilities for improved access and public enjoyment, balanced with an appropriate level of protection and preservation of cultural and natural resources.**

To support this goal, the General Plan will include guidelines that make the following recommendations (these guidelines will be expanded in the General Plan):

- Visitor access, recreation, and interpretive facilities that are essential to the unit and compatible with cultural and natural resource management objectives will continue to be allowed in this zone in the future.
- This zone contains a large archaeological site. Management of this planning zone will be focused on preserving and interpreting this cultural resource.
- Vegetation management in this zone will focus on protection of native species and habitats where possible; and be maintained for compatibility with protection of cultural resources and provisions for facilities development.
- Prominent natural features, including trees, rocks, substantial stands of native vegetation, and watercourses shall be protected or managed in accordance with departmental policies and guidelines and regulatory laws and statutes.
- Restore disturbed sites wherever possible to maintain and improve overall vegetative and aesthetic integrity.

Proposed Planning Goal and Guidelines for Planning Zone #2

The following is the Department's **primary goal for Planning Zone #2**:

- **Provide safe, convenient recreational and interpretive opportunities for visitors, consistent with the protection of cultural resources and the restoration of the health of natural ecosystems.**

To support this goal, the General Plan will include guidelines that make the following recommendations (these guidelines will be expanded in the General Plan):

- Recreational facilities development may continue in this area, with adequate protection of significant natural and cultural sites and features.
- Natural and cultural resources within this zone will be protected and managed according to Department, state, and federal goals and guidelines for these resources.
- Vegetation management in this zone will focus on protection of native species and habitats where possible; and be maintained for compatibility with protection of cultural resources and provisions for facilities development.

Proposed Planning Goal and Guidelines for Planning Zone #3

The following is the Department's **primary goal for Planning Zone #3**:

- **Provide for public access and use of this area. Continue resource studies and best management practices for protection and preservation of significant natural and cultural resources.**

To support this goal, the General Plan will include guidelines that make the following recommendations:

- Conduct necessary resources and planning studies to evaluate and determine long-term land uses and appropriate types of recreation facilities. Development of new recreational facilities may only be considered after appropriate studies have been completed.
- Vegetation management in this zone will focus on protection of native species and habitats where possible; and be maintained for compatibility with protection of cultural resources and provisions for facilities development.
- Continue inventories and evaluation of significant natural and cultural resources within Coldstream Canyon and on new and future acquisitions, and prepare management plans for their protection, preservation, and appropriate use.
- Coordinate with adjacent landowners and federal, state and local agencies during future studies and planning processes, to achieve long-term management objectives for the park.

RECREATION

General Questions and Answers on Recreation Proposals in the General Plan:

Q: Are there any new recreational facilities being proposed for the park?

A: Yes, the new museum/visitor center, a group camp area near the existing Campfire Center, and a group day use area at the east end of Donner Lake. The General Plan will recommend that future studies be made for further identification of appropriate new recreational facilities at Donner Memorial State Park after the General Plan is completed.

Q: What additional opportunities will the public have to recommend changes to existing recreational facilities or propose new facilities?

A: Comments on the Preliminary General Plan/Draft EIR may be submitted during the CEQA (California Environmental Quality Act) process that will begin in August and run for 45 calendar days.

Another opportunity for public input will be at a hearing of the State Park and Recreation Commission, possibly in the Spring of 2003, when the General Plan will be presented for Commission approval.

This General Plan effort is focused primarily on recommending appropriate locations for a new museum/visitor center and to solve traffic conflicts at the park entrance. Comments regarding new recreational facilities or changes to existing facilities can be submitted to the Department at any time. Any comments regarding recreation use will be added to the Department's database of visitor feedback, and park planners can use this information at a future time, when additional studies and management plans can be prepared to address recreational needs and specific projects.

Q: Will the General Plan recommend removal of any facilities or a discontinuation of any recreational activities?

A. Draft General Plan proposals include a recommendation for an evaluation of existing roads and trails in the park, and a relocation or removal of roads or trails that can create serious adverse environmental impacts. It also recommends that future studies be conducted to evaluate and propose construction of new roads and trails to support the goal of providing increased recreational opportunities for park visitors, especially in newly-acquired areas south and west of Coldstream Canyon.

There are no other proposals in the draft General Plan that recommend removal or discontinuation of existing recreational facilities or programs. To serve an increase in visitor demand for high-quality recreational facilities and programs, the draft General Plan proposes evaluation of the capacity of existing facilities to provide a quality recreational experience, and to "embrace facility upgrades" and expansion to do so. In

addition, to respond to recreation trends and visitor desires, it proposes feasibility studies for new types of recreational facilities and programs for the park.

What We Found – A Summary of Existing Park Recreational Opportunities

Facilities and programs at Donner Memorial State Park offer many different ways to enjoy and appreciate the natural and cultural resources at the park. In addition, those visitors so inclined are easily able to find ways of appreciating and using the park away from developed park facilities. The following is a brief list of existing recreational opportunities in the park:

- Visit the Emigrant Trail Museum for history of the Donner Party and an overview of the park's cultural and natural resources. Visit the Pioneer Monument, located by the Museum.
- Take a walk on one of the park's interpretive trails, which offer self-guided tours of beautiful natural areas and interesting cultural sites. Or go on a staff-led interpretive hike that can last two hours or a whole day.
- Swim, fish, boat, or sunbathe at Donner Lake, in the park's beach day use areas.
- Camp in one of the park's 154 developed campsites, and take in a program at the Campfire Center.
- Picnic near Donner Creek, or hike up Coldstream Canyon on the original Emigrant Trail alignment to access trails beyond park boundaries, such as the Pacific Crest Trail.
- Use a bicycle or horse to explore the park's roads and trails, or take the dog for a walk in some areas of the park. Rock climb on the park's huge boulders.
- Cross-country ski in winter along groomed trails through the lower areas of the park.

Proposed Planning Goals and Guidelines for Recreation

Goal for treatment of recreation resources in the park:

- **State Parks should provide a multitude of recreational opportunities that will allow California's diverse population to visit, enjoy, and better understand the significance of the park's resources, while maintaining the highest levels of natural and cultural resource management.**

To support this goal, the General Plan will include guidelines that make the following recommendations (these guidelines will be expanded in the General Plan):

- Plan recreational opportunities within a regional context.
- Provide for recreational activities at the park that are appropriate for its size and varied terrain.
- Recreational opportunities may include (but are not limited to) vehicle and primitive camping, trail hiking, bicycling, swimming, boating, cross-country skiing, rock climbing, nature study, and the enjoyment of solitude.
- Evaluate the current capacities of existing facilities to provide a quality visitor experience. Provide facility upgrades where appropriate.
- Prepare management plans or complete appropriate studies to provide a greater understanding of planning issues and natural and cultural resources for major development projects in the park, including trails.
- In planning for new public facilities, including trails, minimize negative impacts to plant and wildlife species and cultural resources.
- If recreation trends and visitor desires indicate viable interest in types of facilities that would be new to the park, complete feasibility studies as necessary to evaluate compatibility with other uses and resource management objectives.
- Continue to provide public access to the park's waterways, assuring compatibility of public recreation needs with resource management goals for resource protection.
- Explore strategies to provide maximum feasible accessibility to park facilities, campsites, trails, vistas, and interpretive resources.
- Consider possibilities for private concessions to provide recreational activities that are not offered by the Department.
- Consider acquisition of additional properties (by willing sellers) to provide appropriate sites for expansion or relocation of recreational facilities, including trail connections.
- Consider the construction of a new museum/visitor center to allow for expanded interpretive opportunities at the park.
- Consider providing group camp and group day use areas to serve visitors' needs for larger gathering spaces.

NATURAL RESOURCES

General Questions and Answers on Natural Resources in the General Plan:

Q: Are there any special interest species¹ in the park?

A: Twenty-seven fish and wildlife species of special interest were identified as present or potentially occurring in the park. Two fish species were once abundant in the streams and lakes of Donner Memorial State Park; Lahontan cutthroat trout (Federal threatened) and mountain sucker (California species of concern). Suitable habitat exists within the park for mountain yellow-legged frog (Federal proposed endangered). Although no surveys have been conducted for fish or amphibians in recent years, these species may still occur within the park. Removal of non-native predaceous fish together with stream restoration should result in increased populations of these important native species.

Ospreys (California species of concern) are known to nest near Donner Lake. Although nests have not been monitored, ospreys may reproduce successfully in the area, in spite of the high level of shoreline development and intense human activity.

A historic northern goshawk (Federal and California species of concern) nest site may have been lost after insect damaged lodgepole pine was removed. Several areas of mature forest in Coldstream Canyon appear to provide suitable goshawk habitat and should be surveyed.

Raptors, songbirds, bats, and other mammals (Federal and California species of concern) occur in the park and surrounding areas. Habitat assessments and wildlife surveys should be conducted to better understand the existing and potential future value of Donner Memorial State Park habitats to wildlife.

Habitats of interest include wetlands, open water bodies, late successional forest, riparian areas, rock outcrops, and several types of wet and dry meadows. In addition, several plant species of interest are found in the park or the park has suitable habitat to support the plants. Some of these plants include: starved daisy, Donner Pass buckwheat, Plumas ivesia, long-petaled lewisia, Carson Range rock cress, arnica, upswept moonwort, western goblin, fell-fields claytonia, and American scheuchzeria.

¹ Special interest, or special status, species include those listed at the state or federal level as rare, threatened, or endangered, or proposed for such listing, as well as species of special concern. In addition, other land management agencies, such as the U.S. Forest Service or regional land conservancies, have developed criteria for the designation of "special interest species" to be afforded protection.

Q: What will be the impact of the proposed general plan development on the natural resources in the park?

A: We anticipate relatively few impacts to natural resources from the proposed development. The sites chosen for potential development are, for the most part, previously disturbed sites. Also, steps will be taken during the planning process to minimize the impacts to natural resources by developing efficient site designs, defining seasonal construction periods, and conducting additional site analysis and environmental review processes during the planning stages.

Q: Do you consider the resource inventories for the park to be complete?

A: We consider the resource inventory process to be ongoing. The newly acquired lands are excellent candidates for resource assessments. Whenever possible, the Department cooperates with private researchers and other agencies to obtain current information about natural resources in the parks. As part of the CEQA process, focused resource information will be gathered at proposed project sites.

**What We Found –
A Summary of the Natural Resources at Donner Memorial State Park**

Geologic Resources & Sensitivities

Geologic History

Donner Memorial State Park is located near the crest of the Sierra Nevada in the Sierra Nevada Geomorphic Province. In the late Mesozoic Era (205-138 million years ago) the subduction of the Farallon tectonic plate beneath the North American Plate created a chain of volcanoes called the Sierran Arc volcanoes. Over time, as subduction and volcanic eruptions ceased, erosion removed the volcanic rocks to expose the now crystallized magma chambers of the old volcanoes. These crystalline igneous rocks, consisting of predominately granite and granodiorite, form the core of the Sierra Nevada.

A period of intense volcanic activity in the Pliocene to Pleistocene (1 to 5 million years ago) has covered portions of the granitic rocks with a variety of volcanic rocks, including mudflows, andesite, basalt, and tuff and ash flows. At the same time, faulting along the Frontal Fault System has uplifted and tilted the Sierra Nevada block westward, creating the steep eastern escarpment and more gentle western slope. This movement, at a rate of approximately 1mm/year is indicated by the numerous micro-earthquakes (magnitude 2 to 3) that occur periodically in the Truckee-Donner area. Occasional larger earthquakes, as high as magnitude 6.3, have also been recorded in the area.

During the Pleistocene (8,000 years to 1.6 million years ago), at least four major periods of glaciation have occurred in the Sierra Nevada. Valley glaciers have carved the Donner Creek valley into its existing U-shape. Deposition of glacial sediments includes the recessional moraines, which have dammed Donner Creek to form Donner Lake. Four of the recessional moraines can be found in the core area of the park.

Geologic Hazards

Several potential geologic hazards must be considered when planning facilities within the park. Site-specific investigations must be conducted in any areas where new development is planned. Potential geologic hazards are:

- Landslides can occur in the steeper portions of Donner Memorial State Park, especially along Schallenberger Ridge, and in Cold Creek and Lakeview canyons. Special attention must be shown to areas that have been previously logged or subject to forest fires, which can create new landslides and reactivate old ones.
- Impacts from avalanches are not expected in the core area of the park. The north-facing slope of Schallenberger Ridge may be subject to avalanches, as indicated by the construction of snowsheds along the railroad alignment.
- Micro-earthquakes are a common occurrence in the Donner-Truckee area, due to the continued uplift of the Sierra Nevada. Occasional larger earthquakes, up to magnitude 6.3, have occurred in historic time.
- Flooding is possible along Donner Creek and Cold Creek during significant storm events. The flow from Donner Creek is controlled by the dam at the downstream end of Donner Lake. The potential for overtopping exists and flooding of the low-lying areas in the core of the park could occur. This information is based on floodplain maps and a preliminary study of the 100-year floodplain within Donner Memorial State Park.

Water Resources & Sensitivities

Surface Water

The Donner Lake area is located within the North Lahontan Hydrologic Basin, as defined by the California Department of Water Resources. The main watershed is the Truckee River, of which Donner Creek, with a 14 square mile watershed, is an important tributary. Donner Creek/Summit Creek were naturally dammed by a recessional moraine to create Donner Lake. The lake level is now controlled by a man-made dam constructed in 1928.

Cold Creek, a tributary to Donner Creek, drains a watershed of approximately 12 square miles (7,680 acres). Portions of the Cold Creek watershed are within the park, but much of the watershed is privately owned. Several artificial lakes occur in the Cold Creek watershed. These lakes or ponds, located parallel to Cold Creek, were created to harvest ice. They appear to intercept groundwater and apparently are not hydrologically connected to Cold Creek. They provide important vegetation and wildlife habitat.

Groundwater

Limited information exists on the groundwater resources in the park. Within the park, the principal aquifer consists of glacial till and alluvial materials along streams and rivers.

Flood-Prone Areas

The potential for flooding exists in the low-lying areas of the park along Donner Creek and Cold Creek. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) has mapped Donner Memorial State Park as Zone D, an area of undetermined, but possible flood hazard. The 100-year and 500-year floodplains have been delineated along Donner Creek east of the park and for Cold Creek. A preliminary study has been conducted to determine the 100-year floodplain in the park.

Water Quality

Surface water and groundwater quality is an important issue in the Truckee basin. Most of the water quality problems are related to nonpoint sources such as soil erosion from timber harvest areas, stormwater runoff (soil and chemicals), and individual wastewater disposal systems. A Nondegradation Policy has also been established by the Regional Water Quality Control Board to protect all waters (surface, wetlands, and groundwater) in the Lahontan Basin. This policy requires continued maintenance of existing high quality waters.

Water Supply

Currently, the Park receives its water supply from the Truckee Donner Public Utility District (TDPUD). The TDPUD acquires its water from aquifers hundreds of feet deep within the Truckee groundwater basin. The TDPUD also acquired the Donner Lake water system in May of 2001 and is in the process of rehabilitating the system.

Vegetation Resources & Sensitivities

Donner Memorial State Park provides visitors a diversity of mid-elevation Sierran ecosystems to experience: coniferous forests, streamside and lakeshore deciduous woodlands, montane chaparral, wet and dry meadows, marshes, and the open waters of Donner Lake and smaller ponds. Donner's location between crests of the Sierra Nevada also contributes to its vegetational complexity, with species common in desert regions sharing habitat with those more representative of the moist climates to the west. While we found no evidence or records of rare, threatened, or endangered plant species in the park, or on recently acquired lands, sensitive habitats, such as wetlands and significant rock outcrops, are prominent features of the landscape. While the vegetation in the park's core area has sustained moderate levels of human-induced impacts -- soil erosion and compaction, plant trampling, and establishment of non-native species, for example -- it retains many of its historical elements. These provide a foundation for the preservation and restoration activities provided for in the General Plan.

The full extent of impacts borne from 150 years of human use cannot be measured, but some of the impacted areas can be ameliorated through the implementation of a comprehensive vegetation management plan. The park's vegetation managers face multiple challenges in the years ahead: repairing habitats and restoring ecosystem processes necessary to sustain ecological vitality, while also planning for the protection of species and habitats that could be affected by increasing demand for recreational access.

Wildlife Resources & Sensitivities

Donner MSP provides habitat to many familiar wildlife species as well as sensitive species that may require special attention in management and planning. Familiar species include mule deer, golden-mantled ground squirrel, Douglas squirrel, northern flicker, Steller's jay, song sparrow, western fence lizard, and pacific tree frog. Sensitive species include Sierran Nevada showshoe hare, Sierra Nevada mountain beaver, lodgepole chipmunk, pine marten, osprey, northern goshawk, olive-sided flycatcher, and yellow warbler.

During the general plan process, literature searches were conducted to identify the wildlife species and habitats that might be present in the park. A partial list of sensitive species that are known to be present or may occur in the park will be provided in the Resource Summary for the General Plan. The inventory process is never complete. It is an ongoing evolving process of discovery. Any development projects proposed in the General Plan, when initiated, will include assessment and field surveys for sensitive wildlife species.

Proposed Planning Goals and Guidelines For Natural Resources

The Department's Mission provides the impetus for the preservation of the state's biological diversity through the protection of its natural resources. The Declaration of Purpose for Donner Memorial State Park specifies goals for restoring biodiversity and maintaining links to the Sierra Nevada bioregion in order to fulfill the Park Vision. In the spirit of the Mission and the Park Vision, the park's natural resources will benefit from a progressive, pro-active management approach that sets a high standard for environmental protection and advocacy. The natural resource goals described here are also designed to complement those that provide for cultural resources management and preservation and interpretive and recreational opportunities in the park.

Overall goal for natural resources management:

- **Preserve and enhance the park's terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems, including all sensitive habitats and native species of animals, plants, fungi, and lichens, in order to protect natural features and biological processes, while providing for sustained public enjoyment of these resources.**

Supporting guidelines for this goal are outlined below:

Vegetation Resources

The management of Donner Memorial State Park's vegetation will require an understanding of ecological principles as well as knowledge about the area's natural and human history. Planning will provide for the preservation of the area's biological integrity while also addressing the public demand for recreation. The park includes fine examples of the area's native vegetation, yet managers will need to address human-induced impacts in order to preserve natural resources to the optimal extent where

appropriate. In the process of improving plant and animal habitat, managers will strive to minimize new and potentially damaging impacts that could arise from recreational uses or other activities in the park. With the recent acquisition of extensive backcountry areas, ample opportunities exist for the enhancement and preservation of vegetation as well as for augmenting the park's diverse recreational opportunities.

Goal for management of vegetation resources:

- **Promote protection, enhancement, and restoration of the park's native plant species, populations, and communities, and the form and function of its ecosystems.**

To support this goal, the General Plan will include guidelines that make the following recommendations (these guidelines will be expanded in the General Plan):

- Develop a comprehensive and flexible vegetation management plan that preserves and enhances the historic vegetation diversity of Sierran forests;
- Inventory the park's plant, fungal, and lichen species, accomplished through site-specific surveys prior to development or management activities;
- Use geographical information system technology to store, interpret, and manage data;
- Protect and restore wetland habitats;
- Protect larger trees, rock outcrops, and other ecologically sensitive areas;
- Implement monitoring and adaptive management principles to preserve sensitive species and habitats;
- Consider use of a prescribed burning program integrated with other components of park management;
- Establish a non-native species monitoring and management program;
- Integrate habitat restoration with other park management activities;
- Acquisition of new lands, if available by willing sellers, with vegetation integrity and habitat preservation as key priorities.

Wildlife Resources

Goal for treatment of wildlife resources in the park:

- **The Department will endeavor to rehabilitate, protect, and ensure the perpetuation of native fish and wildlife populations at Donner Memorial State**

Park. Protect and where appropriate restore special animals within the park and manage for their perpetuation in accordance with state and federal laws.

To support this goal, the General Plan will include guidelines that make the following recommendations (these guidelines will be expanded in the General Plan):

- Conduct ongoing, comprehensive inventories of the park's sensitive wildlife and habitats;
- Develop specific management programs, including scientific monitoring, mapping, and demographic studies, for locally important and protected wildlife species;
- Rehabilitate degraded wildlife habitats;
- Evaluate existing roads and trails through a Road and Trails Management Plan; remove roads and trails that are not required for fire protection or other appropriate park activity to minimize impacts of disturbance to wildlife;
- Avoid ecological imbalances resulting from human activities;
- Consider reintroduction of eradicated native species if suitable habitat exists within the park and the region to support its survival;
- Reduce wildlife access to human food and garbage by using wildlife-proof trash containers throughout the park, including in the administration and residence areas.

Geological and Hydrological Resources

Goal for treatment of geological and hydrological resources:

- **Identify potential management actions to minimize any negative impacts to the park's natural processes from facilities planned for the park. Also identify areas of geological or hydrologic sensitivities to insure that any future projects will not negatively impact the park's natural environment.**

To support this goal, the General Plan will include guidelines that make the following recommendations (these guidelines will be expanded in the General Plan):

- Include professional (hydrology, geology, engineering) evaluations for the siting and design of permanent structures, campgrounds, roads, trails, and other facilities to mitigate potential damage from unstable soil, landslides, avalanches, flooding, and earthquake-induced damage.
- Perform slope stability and soils studies in public use areas. Employ management actions that minimize erosion and prevent the creation or reactivation of landslides to reduce the risk of erosion hazards to people and resources.

- Determine areas subject to avalanches on the slopes of Schallenberger Ridge (or other areas) and prevent the construction of any park structures or campgrounds in those areas.
- Areas subject to flooding along Donner Creek, Donner Lake, and Cold Creek, and any tributaries should be identified. Future facility development should be designed to avoid negative impacts to the floodplain and to minimize potential flood damage.
- Damage from earthquakes is not expected to be a major concern in the park. However, any new structures should be built according to the appropriate seismic guidelines for the area as set forth in the Uniform Building Code (latest accepted edition).
- Provide interpretive programs on the geology of the park, how the park was shaped by geologic forces, and the potential geologic hazards within the park.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

General Questions and Answers on Cultural Resources in the General Plan:

Q. How will the Department protect historic and Native American sites and features with new development?

A. The core area of the park is known to contain numerous historic and Native American features. The in-park site alternative proposed for the new museum has the least significant and most disturbed cultural resource area of any place in the park's core. Archaeological testing will be done prior to any facility development, and monitoring will be carried out during construction. Any new construction project is required to go through a CEQA evaluation and public comment period.

Q. How will current planning efforts affect the historic Pioneer Monument?

A. The General Plan is recommending that the current museum building be converted to park offices, after the new museum/visitor center is built. When this happens, the building will be screened from cultural sites and public use areas such as the Pioneer Monument and the loop trail to the Murphy Cabin site. In addition, the existing museum parking lot will be reduced in size to minimize impacts to these cultural sites and to enhance visitors' enjoyment of them. The Pioneer Monument site may be enhanced by installation of interpretive panels, seating, and other site amenities to allow a more enriched experience of the site.

What We Found – A Summary of Existing Park Cultural Resources and History:

- The area around Donner Lake has provided resources used by Native American peoples for at least 4,000 years. The Washoe and the Paiute Native American tribes made camps and used the area to gather food plants, medicinal plants, and to hunt and fish. Fishing was also done during the winter months.
- The first Euroamericans who came into the area were interested in finding passage over the Sierra Nevada. Pre-argonaut (before gold discovery) parties that passed through the Donner Lake area include the Stephens-Townsend-Murphy party in November of 1844. The John Fremont expedition traveled through the area and camped near Cold Creek on December 3, 1845. In 1846 the Donner Party attempted a passage through the Sierra. Two of the cabins they occupied were in what is now Donner Memorial State Park and the other is on Alder Creek, outside the park.
- In 1857 the first wagon toll road was completed over the summit. It ran adjacent to the north boundary of the park.
- Theodore Judah and then Leland Stanford and the other members of the “Big Four” were surveying potential rights of way for the railroad by 1860.
- Several way station hotels and timber harvesting companies were in place by 1864. The railroad was completed in 1868.
- The building of the railroad gave rise to lumbering and an ice harvesting industry. Ice harvesting companies developed shallow ponds from the Donner area east to Boca. Icing rail cars carrying fresh produce to the east became a big business that continued well into the 20th century.
- Commercial fishing on Donner Lake and surrounding rivers and streams also grew with the advent of the railroad, and fresh trout were iced and shipped as far as San Francisco.
- The advent of the automobile and rapid growth of automobile touring shortly after the turn of the 20th century created pressure for roads, and the “Lincoln Highway” was dedicated in 1909. Parts of the road were not paved until the late 1920s. The route became U.S. Highway 40. Interstate 80 was completed in 1960.
- Today Interstate 80 and the Union Pacific Railway make Donner Pass the most important transportation corridor connecting California with the east.
- It is no surprise that the two major industries in the Donner/Truckee area are transportation and tourism.

Proposed Planning Goal and Guidelines for Cultural Resources

Goal for treatment of cultural resources in the park:

- **Ensure the highest level of appropriate protection, stabilization, preservation, and interpretation of the park's cultural resources, focusing in areas of exceptional archeological and historical significance.**

To support this goal, the General Plan will include guidelines that make the following recommendations (these guidelines will be expanded in the General Plan):

- Prepare a park-wide Cultural Resources Management Plan that establishes an ongoing management process to record and develop findings of significance for cultural resources in the park that are historically or archeologically important.
- The park-wide Cultural Resources Management Plan should also identify and evaluate potential cultural landscapes within the park, especially in the new acquisitions, including but not limited to the Coldstream Canyon and Schallenberger Ridge parcels. Cultural landscapes are defined, in part, as landscapes that evolved through use by peoples whose activities or occupancy shaped them.
- Any plan for restoration, remodeling, adaptive reuse, or non-use must comply with the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties* and will require careful consideration to ensure the widest public benefit.
- Develop a research program that will address past lifeways of the Washoe within the park. Research topics should address settlement patterns, subsistence technology, trade and exchange, and sociopolitical functions.
- Consult regularly with Washoe and other groups who have traditional ties to resources within the park to ensure productive, collaborative working relationships.
- Consider acquisition of land available from willing sources, if necessary, that would provide a buffer for the protection of especially significant historic, prehistoric, and archaeological sites or properties of concern to Native Americans.

INTERPRETATION

General Questions and Answers on Interpretation Proposals in the General Plan:

Q. Why is it necessary to build a new museum/visitor center?

A. The existing museum size is inadequate to properly accommodate the current number of visitors or to provide the necessary space to staff and maintain the facility. There is currently inadequate space allocated for natural history exhibits in the existing facility.

Q. How will the themes of the new museum be different from the existing one?

A. The current Emigrant Trail Museum is focused primarily on stories of the pioneers' travels west and early settlement of the region, including descriptions of Native American history and the Donner Party. The new museum will expand in focus to include the history of human, biological, and geological transmutations in the area through time. It will also focus on transportation history – trail, road, highway, and railroad - through the Donner Pass/Truckee area.

Q. If a new museum/visitor center is to be developed on the Teichert property how will it be funded?

A. The Department has entered into a public/private partnership with A. Teichert and Son, Inc., who owns property to the east of Donner Memorial State Park, to take advantage of funding opportunities for a new museum/visitor center for the park. An application for grant funds was made to the federal Transportation Enhancement Activities (TEA) program in the spring of 2001.

The California Transportation Commission approved \$3.1 million in May 2002 to launch the project. Teichert has pledged a further \$1 million. The Department and Teichert will partner to explore procurement of additional funding to make this a successful project.

Q. What is planned for future use of the existing museum?

A. Once the new museum/visitor center has been opened to the public, the existing museum structure will be converted to offices for park operations. The existing museum parking lot will be reduced in size to minimize impacts and enhance this area for visitors. Short-term and disabled access parking would be provided for the Pioneer Monument and the interpretive trail loop by the Murphy Cabin site. An interpretive trail connection from the new visitor center to this site is proposed in our plan.

What We Found – A Summary of Existing Interpretive Opportunities in the Park

Donner Memorial State Park features natural, cultural and recreational resources of long, slow, ever changing, multi-cultural processes sometimes fraught with failure. The parklands bear witness to the prehistory and history of the population, industrialization and modernization of the west.

Existing interpretive programs and facilities for the visitor at Donner Memorial State Park do not tell the complete story of the region's geological formation and plant, animal and human use of this area. There is the potential to tell all these interesting stories, along with the story of the pioneers and the Donner Party, in a way that connects historic events and times with our experience today.

The following is a list of interpretive activities and programs currently offered at the park:

Guided tours and hikes; living history and other demonstrations; formal exhibits both indoors and outdoors, with changing exhibits; dioramas, murals, videos; interpretive trails including one along the shore of Donner Lake and a trail loop that passes by the Murphy Cabin site and Donner Creek; an environmental education program for children; the Junior Ranger and Litter Getter Programs; a non-profit cooperating partnership; outreach activities and off-site programs; and publications.

Proposed Planning Goals and Guidelines for Interpretation

Goal for interpretation in the park:

- **Interpret to the public the resources of Donner Memorial State Park to promote a broader understanding of the interdependency, diversity and value of all life, and to connect visitors through all their senses to the park's intrinsic resource values.**

To support this goal, the General Plan will include guidelines that make the following recommendations (these guidelines will be expanded in the General Plan):

- The conceptual means to facilitate visitors' connections to existing resources are universally understood truths that underlie all cultures, i.e., birth, life, adversity, struggle, health, mortality, etc. The Department should attempt to integrate these into interpretive programs and facilities to assist the public in understanding the resources and history of the park.
- The Department should consider the creation of a docent program. A docent program could expand interpretive efforts at the park by leading tours and hikes or assisting with operations in the museum.

- The Department should develop a unifying theme for interpretation to provide conceptual consistency for interpretive exhibits and programs throughout the park.
- Expand the focus of the new museum/visitor center to include the history of human, biological, and geological transmutations in the area through time. Also focus on transportation history – trail, road, highway, and railroad - through the Donner Pass/ Truckee area.

WHAT'S NEXT?

General Questions and Answers on Public Review and Comment Opportunities on the Preliminary General Plan/Draft Environmental Impact Report:

Q: When will I have an opportunity to comment on the planning proposals for Donner Memorial State Park?

A: The formal public review and comment period for the General Plan will be during the required California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) review of the Preliminary General Plan/Draft EIR. The planning team anticipates that this will begin during August and continue until September 23, 2002.

Another opportunity for public input will be at the State Park and Recreation Commission hearing when the General Plan is presented for Commission approval. The hearing is tentatively scheduled for Spring 2003.

Park staff always welcomes your comments and suggestions on ways we can improve our planning efforts, our management of park resources and facilities, and our service to the public.

Q: How will I know when the Preliminary General Plan/Draft Environmental Impact Report is available for review?

A: The public will be notified in a variety of ways:

- The next Donner Memorial State Park General Plan Newsletter (Newsletter #2) will contain information noting the public comment period and the locations where you will have an opportunity to review the Preliminary General Plan/Draft EIR. The newsletter will also include a discussion of the public comments gathered from the public planning workshop. The newsletter will be posted on the State Parks web site (<http://www.parks.ca.gov>), or you can contact the Project Manager to receive the next General Plan Newsletter by regular mail:

Gudrun Baxter, Project Manager
California State Parks
P.O. Box 942896
Sacramento, CA 94296-0001
(916) 445-8909

- The State Parks web site will have an announcement when the documents are available for review.
- A Notice of Availability will be announced in the local media.
- Information will be posted at Donner Memorial State Park.

A Summary of Public Review and Comment Opportunities:

May 30, 2002:

Public Planning Workshop at Donner Memorial State Park

August-September 2002:

Public Review and Comment period for Preliminary General Plan/Draft EIR (45-day California Environmental Quality Act process).

Spring 2003 (tentative):

State Park and Recreation Commission Hearing (Public Meeting).